

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

FY2012 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant Name: United Way of Central West Virginia	Application ID: 12AC132962
Program Name: LifeBridge AmeriCorps	

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. This feedback is provided on a restricted basis and cannot be shared or distributed outside of your organization. We hope you will find this information helpful in completing applications to our future grant competitions. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of your application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

- Proof of need is cited through several sources: the Appalachian Regional Commission categorizes 38% of West Virginia counties as distressed or at-risk; Census Bureau figures from 2009 show almost 18% of the state's population to be living below the federal poverty level; and unemployment is high.
- Need of literacy and math training is shown by the citation from the National Center for Education Statistics (2009) that less than 65% of WV's 4th graders are proficient readers and more than 75% of these students are below basic achievement in math.
- Need for help with long term hunger and poor nutrition is established well through other citations that include evidence that 20% of WV's children are obese.
- The plan for AmeriCorps members to create positive change in the fields of education, job readiness, financial literacy and human services by serving vulnerable and at-risk individuals, children and families is community-based and in place. The recruited Members will be divided into two corps: the Education Corps and the Health and Human Services Corps.
- AmeriCorps members are the most effective means to solving the communities' needs because they are recruited from the communities they serve and understand their culture.
- Members stay in touch with critical needs within their communities, helping vulnerable individuals. In 2010, four Members worked with another non-profit agency to increase knowledge about bone marrow donorship; they worked collaboratively to set up screening stations. As a result a little girl's life was saved when she was matched with a donor.
- Proposed interventions for at-risk students are based on research that shows such interventions to have a positive impact on academic performance. The proposed college retention interventions of peer mentoring and support also have been shown to be successful.
- The applicant's training for AmeriCorps members includes 200 hours targeting community leadership, problem-

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solving, conflict management, and effective communication in addition to their training in the specific skills they will be helping others achieve, such as financial literacy and job skills. The description of the Members' experiences is solid and demonstrates overall benefits to the communities and those individuals they will serve.

- The connections to other AmeriCorps participants is planned: each Member works with a 2nd year Member or an alumni as well as with a professional mentor from the business community during the service year. Members also participate in a state-wide program on community leadership and with other national service participants in WV.
- An important program component is the support that Members will receive during their year of service. Site supervisors will be trained extensively and will be responsible for day-to-day supervision. Their close monitoring will help Members cope with activities and provide daily encouragement.
- Each AmeriCorps member is to recruit and train a minimum of 25 non-duplicated volunteers through a variety of volunteer registries available through LifeBridge's network of partners. As a result, many of the volunteers continue to help once AmeriCorps support has ended.
- Outcomes seem logical and appropriate and as a result, past outcomes demonstrate positive changes in the targeted performance areas. For example, Members provided academic support and/or mentoring to 9,851 school age children and 98% of the parents surveyed reported that services provided by AmeriCorps members were beneficial to their children. Another success was noted as AmeriCorps members have recruited and trained 4,237 non-duplicated community volunteers, which is more than twice the targeted number.
- While the applicant states that the proposed tutoring and mentoring interventions are based on solid research, the interventions are not listed or described.
- The applicant states that individuals participating in the job skills program will report an increase in job skills. However, there is no description offered to explain what research-based interventions will be used by AmeriCorps members to help clients improve their job skills.
- The applicant provides extensive data on needs throughout the state of West Virginia, including distressed counties, poverty, unemployment, educational attainment of parents, educational attainment of youth, and food insecurity. National data points are connected to local community's needs.
- Members are often already a part of the communities they serve and that provides ease in navigating cultural barriers. Since these Members are often a part of the community (high need), they also benefit from the job skills and experience of the program, which also then enhances the community.
- The application is outstanding as it identifies a community need and has a strategy for AmeriCorps members to address these needs, while gaining skills themselves. In addition, AmeriCorps members will be trained in best practices of effective volunteer management and support, leveraging the assets of the communities it serves.
- The applicant demonstrates clear need in the communities served and has a long history of addressing these needs in effective ways, and a solid model to engage AmeriCorps members to address the issues.
- The applicant made effective use of national and state data to establish the integrated need for youth education, adult employment assistance, and nutritious food supply.
- For program components that have a demonstrated need, a clearly defined intervention, and a track record of positive impact (mentoring and tutoring, food and nutrition), the anticipated positive outcome is likely to

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continue.

- However, there was some mismatch between the identified needs and intervention. Financial literacy was an identified need but the intervention was not explicitly discussed. College retention was discussed as an intervention but the need for it was not established.
- In addition, the intervention calls for different types and levels of skills. The competency and in-service training of AmeriCorps members were not sufficiently clarified to indicate that they may effectively deliver the needed intervention—especially for employment related and financial literacy services.
- The applicant addresses what AmeriCorps members will do by describing specific activities that Members will engage in to develop leadership skills, provide job skills training, and alleviate hunger within the target community.
- The applicant describes the value added by AmeriCorps by pointing out that program partners that request AmeriCorps members will be required to show how Member work will align with the organization's mission to offer new and expanded services.
- The applicant explains that measurement targets were established based on average outcomes from previous program years.
- The applicant demonstrates that outcomes will be reported using the quarterly system established by the West Virginia Commission for National and Community Service.
- The applicant clarifies the volunteer recruitment strategy by pointing out that AmeriCorps members will recruit volunteers by using the State Commission's Web-based data system and volunteer referral registries to match skills and interests to identified needs.
- The applicant explains how AmeriCorps members will participate in a pre-service orientation that includes experiential activities with second year AmeriCorps members and opportunities to set their personal and professional goals. The proposal shows how these structured opportunities will provide for a quality Member experience that promotes a lifelong ethic of service and civic responsibility.
- The applicant states that the organization has a history of recruiting Members from underrepresented groups, but provides no information to demonstrate a record of success in this area.
- The applicant does not demonstrate that the AmeriCorps members' participation in the proposed training will prepare them to perform all of the activities they will engage in during their year of service.
- The applicant does not clearly demonstrate that the identified needs exist in the target community because the proposal does not logically link the demographic data to support the applicant's claims about the community needs.